

IN THE CLAIMS

Please amend the claims as follows:

Claim 1 (Original): Process for removing halide compounds adhering to finely divided metal oxide particles by means of steam, the metal oxide particles being formed by reaction of halide-containing starting materials by hydrolysis or oxidising gases, wherein the finely divided metal oxide particles containing residues of halide compounds are applied, together with reaction gases, to the upper part of an upright column and migrate downwards by means of gravity,

the steam, optionally mixed with air, is applied at the bottom end of the column,

the finely divided metal oxide particles containing residues of halide compounds and the steam are fed counter-currently, and

the metal oxide particles freed of halide residues are removed at the base of the column,

steam and halide residues are removed at the head of the column,

which process is characterised in that

the column is heated in such a manner that the temperature difference $T_{\text{bottom}} - T_{\text{top}}$ between the lower part and the upper part of the column is at least 20°C and a maximum temperature of 500°C prevails in the column, and

the metal oxide particles have a residence time in the column of from 1 second to 30 minutes.

Claim 2 (Original): Process according to claim 1, characterised in that the temperature difference $T_{\text{bottom}} - T_{\text{top}}$ is from 20°C to 150°C.

Claim 3 (Currently Amended): Process according to claim 1 ~~or 2~~, characterised in that the maximum temperature in the column is from 150 to 500°C.

Claim 4 (Currently Amended): Process according to claim 1 ~~claims 1 to 3~~, characterised in that the residence time is from 5 seconds to 5 minutes.

Claim 5 (Currently Amended): Process according to claim 1 ~~claims 1 to 4~~, characterised in that the metal oxide particles in the stream entering the column have a temperature of from about 100°C to 500°C.

Claim 6 (Currently Amended): Process according to claim 1 ~~claims 1 to 5~~, characterised in that the amount of steam that is introduced is from 0.0025 to 0.25 kg of steam per hour per kg of metal oxide particles.

Claim 7 (Currently Amended): Process according to claim 1 ~~claims 1 to 6~~, characterised in that the amount of air admixed with the steam is from 0.005 to 0.2 m³ of air per kg of metal oxide particles per hour.

Claim 8 (Currently Amended): Process according to claim 1 ~~claims 1 to 7~~, characterised in that, after the metal oxide particles have been removed at the base of the column, they are passed through at least one further column in which the maximum temperature does not exceed 500°C.

Claim 9 (Original): Process according to claim 8, characterised in that the metal oxide particles and the steam are fed co-currently or counter-currently in the further columns.

Claim 10 (Currently Amended): Process according to claim 8 ~~or 9~~, characterised in that the second and subsequent columns have a temperature difference $T_{\text{bottom}} - T_{\text{top}}$ between the lower part and the upper part of the columns of at least 5°C.

Claim 11 (New): The process of claim 2, wherein the maximum temperature in the column is from 150 to 500°C.

Claim 12 (New): The process of claim 2, wherein the residence time is from 5 seconds to 5 minutes.

Claim 13 (New): The process of claim 3, wherein the residence time is from 5 seconds to 5 minutes.

Claim 14 (New): The process of claim 2, wherein the metal oxide particles in the stream entering the column have a temperature of from about 100°C to 500°C.

Claim 15 (New): The process of claim 3, wherein the metal oxide particles in the stream entering the column have a temperature of from about 100°C to 500°C.

Claim 16 (New): The process of claim 4, wherein the metal oxide particles in the stream entering the column have a temperature of from about 100°C to 500°C.

Claim 17 (New): The process of claim 2, wherein the amount of steam that is introduced is from 0.0025 to 0.25 kg of steam per hour per kg of metal oxide particles.

Claim 18 (New): The process of claim 3, wherein the amount of steam that is introduced is from 0.0025 to 0.25 kg of steam per hour per kg of metal oxide particles.

Claim 19 (New): The process of claim 4, wherein the amount of steam that is introduced is from 0.0025 to 0.25 kg of steam per hour per kg of metal oxide particles.

Claim 20 (New): The process of claim 5, wherein the amount of steam that is introduced is from 0.0025 to 0.25 kg of steam per hour per kg of metal oxide particles.